



The 2018 Call for Action for the Wadden Sea

After the Leeuwarden Conference: Improving Protection and Strengthening Partnerships

Presented by the Nature NGOs of the Wadden Sea Region, September 2018

The Wadden Sea is a unique habitat for which Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands share a common responsibility. For the past 40 years, the three countries have worked together to protect the Wadden Sea and are committed to preserving it in the long term. In 2009 the efforts of this cooperation and all others involved were rewarded by UNESCO's decision to designate the Wadden Sea as a World Heritage Site for its outstanding ecological values.

Against this background, [the 13th Trilateral Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea](#) of the three countries took place on 18th May 2018 in Leeuwarden (NL). Although the conference and the signed Leeuwarden Declaration provided important and motivating decisions and suggestions for improving the protection, major challenges remain and urgent actions from all three countries are required in the near future to ensure a credible and effective protection of the area. Germany has taken over the presidency of the Trilateral Cooperation for the next four years and thus has a coordinating and driving role.

Although the Wadden Sea is a protected area, it still faces many threats, including increased demands on its use. We, the Nature NGOs of the Wadden Sea Region, have been committed to protecting the Wadden Sea for decades and are still very concerned about its ecological status. Taking up our [Call for Action](#) from 2014, we hereby ask the governments, the regional and local public bodies and all those who live in the region or have a stake there to make significant progress in the protection of the Wadden Sea by the next Wadden Sea Conference in four years' time.

As a fundamental basis for a successful protection of the Wadden Sea, the cooperation and partnerships across the borders need to be strengthened. It is crucial to have the support of society at large and to enhance the collaboration with the stakeholders in the region. The already existing networks, such as the National Park partnerships, must be consolidated and innovative partnerships must be created. The planned Partnership Center in Wilhelmshaven with its potential for new networks, needs to be strongly promoted and supported. This should enable partners to fulfill a complementary function to the intergovernmental institutions of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation. The latter need to continue and reinforce their work for the protection of the Wadden Sea and the implementation of the obligations associated with it. For joint conservation projects and to support the new networks, a "World Heritage Wadden Sea Foundation" should be established by the Wadden Sea States. The World Heritage label should be used to enhance visibility, whilst always supporting protection and without breaching its credibility.





To achieve urgently needed progress in the protection of the Wadden Sea we suggest focusing on the following conservation issues during the coming years

1. Better under water protection: Today, almost all fisheries in the Wadden Sea are [MSC](#) certified. Unfortunately, carrying this ecolabel does not mean that these fisheries comply with the overall protection goals for the Wadden Sea. This shows the flaws in the legislation and its implementation, such as missing impact assessments, but also in the certification standard of MSC, which is not yet appropriate for fisheries in protected areas. These flaws must be addressed urgently. To restore lost ecosystem functions and species and allow nature to develop as undisturbed as possible – as stated in the Wadden Sea's Guiding Principle – many of the tidal basins must be completely closed to all fisheries.

Additionally and in line with the Swimway Vision signed by many stakeholders in Leeuwarden, obstacles in rivers must be modified to allow fish to migrate again between the Wadden Sea and upriver habitats. Similarly, the estuaries in the Wadden Sea Region have to be restored as intact and healthy ecosystems. Furthermore, a better understanding of the function of the Wadden Sea as a habitat for fish is needed.

Another major impact on the underwater world of the Wadden Sea is the dredging and dumping of sand and mud, particularly in the area between the Ems and Elbe. It is crucial to restrict the permissions severely and to initiate and implement a trilaterally coordinated sediment management strategy, including an integral exchange of information between the three states to reduce the massive impact on the ecosystem.

2. Better protection for coastal birds: We support the further development of the "Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative", which is designed to protect the Wadden Sea birds along their entire flyway. In addition to the successful cooperation with partners from the South where most of our birds winter, there must be similar initiatives for the Arctic where most of them breed. Equally, the habitats of the birds in the Wadden Sea itself and in adjacent areas of the mainland need to be improved as numbers for many of them are declining. For the breeding birds, the introduction of land predators on the islands as well as the loss of natural dynamics in formerly sandy habitats must be avoided and reversed. Agricultural practice in polder areas must better comply with nature protection.

3. Sustainable shipping: While we appreciate the joint initiative of many Wadden Sea ports to become more sustainable, their efforts must also be measured against ambitious environmental criteria. Most importantly there must be no further deepening of the shipping channels and Wadden Sea ports must not be extended any further into the Wadden Sea. Expansion proposals such as that in Esbjerg must be stopped. Further steps need to be taken such as achieving emission free shipping and a ban of high-speed vessels in the Wadden Sea. Generally ships and shipping need to adapt to the environment instead of vice versa.

As the case of the "Glory Amsterdam" in 2017 has dramatically shown, the precautionary measures against ship accidents need to be improved. The status of the "Particularly Sensitive Sea Area" (PSSA) needs to be strengthened by additional measures such as improving traffic management, emergency reaction (e.g. enough appropriate emergency tugs available at all times, oil spill preparedness) and pilotage.

The three countries must jointly work towards achieving a complete ban on paraffin release at sea by the IMO and thus stop this continuously occurring pollution. The permanent flow of marine litter from ships – but also from land – into the Wadden Sea must also be reduced drastically.

4. Tourism as a partner, education as a joint mission:

The strategy on "[Sustainable Tourism in the Wadden Sea World Heritage Destination](#)" was agreed by the ministers and signed by the relevant stakeholders in 2014. It must be implemented into daily practice and with greater ambition. Two examples for better implementation are the reduction of light pollution and showing greater respect for nature protection when it comes to new activities with potentially high impact such as kitesurfing. It is also becoming increasingly necessary to consider and respect limits to the growth of tourism in the Wadden Sea Region. Where thresholds are reached and before the harm becomes too much, capacities should not be expanded any further.

Without good communication and education the protection of the Wadden Sea will not be possible in the long-term. We strongly support the "[Wadden Sea Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development and World Heritage Interpretation](#)", which was agreed upon in Leeuwarden and urge for an ambitious implementation.



5. Act now for ecologically sound climate protection and prepare for future adaptation:

The impact of climate change will dramatically influence the Wadden Sea and its region. The region is clearly in a position to contribute more to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and to achieve the goal of CO₂ neutrality for the region by 2030, as decided by the Wadden Sea countries in 2010. However, it is of great importance to set up renewable energy sources in compliance with nature protection and the well-being of the people living in the area, whilst always adhering to the climate protection ambition. This includes not building energy production facilities within or close to protected areas as well as restricting and bundling cables to minimise their impact. The burning of fossil fuels needs to be phased out on all levels. Gas and oil extractions as well as planned further exploration and exploitation in Dutch and German waters are in no way compatible with the Wadden Sea's protection and must be stopped.

Climate adaptation measures to compensate for the increase in sea level rise need to be implemented in line with the [Trilateral Climate Change Adaptation Strategy](#) from 2014. Coastal protection and nature protection must work hand in hand. We strongly suggest learning from positive examples of well-developed regional strategies and from experiences gained with local pilot projects. Restoring natural processes and repairing the damage that has been done would also contribute greatly to the safety of people.



The Nature NGOs of the three countries are convinced that, based on the previous points, considerable progress can be achieved within the next four years and urge the Wadden Sea states to rise to the challenge. We offer our cooperation and partnership to help achieve a better protection for the Wadden Sea.

Foto: Georg Wietschorke

The following organisations support this Call for Action:

Denmark:

Danmarks Naturfredningsforening
 Dansk Ornitologisk Forening
 Verdensnaturfonden (WWF-DK)

Germany:

Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (BUND)
 Landesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz Niedersachsen (LBU)
 Mellumrat
 NaturFreunde Niedersachsen
 Naturschutzbund Deutschland (NABU)
 Naturschutzgesellschaft Schutzstation Wattenmeer
 Naturschutzverband Niedersachsen (NVN)
 Verein Jordsand zum Schutz der Seevögel und der Natur
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 WWF Deutschland

Netherlands:

The Coalitie Wadden Natuurlijk consisting of It Fryske Gea, Landschap Noord-Holland, Stichting Het Groninger Landschap, Stichting WAD, Vereniging Natuurmonumenten, Vogelbescherming Nederland and Waddenvereniging Wereld Natuur Fonds (WWF-NL)

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